

Neighborhood Event Planning: It's More Than A Party

By Kathleen Sutherland and Debra Yantis

Goals of the Event - any event should be a unique expression of your neighborhood association. It should have long term impact on your community, not just one-day of entertainment. The event should be informational, inspiring and community building. All participants, especially volunteers, should be touched, moved and inspired by the whole experience thus producing great visions for the next event.

Planning the Event - The First Commandment: Start Early

The Five Questions you must answer -

- 1) Why?
- 2) What?
- 3) When?
- 4) Where?
- 5) How?

Why -

- Why are you having this event?
- Is it truly necessary?
- Will it leave your community enriched?
- Will it make a difference a year from now?
- What will be your measurable definition of success?

What -

- What is the theme of your event?
- What is it meant to communicate about your community?
- Do you want to be known for this image over time?

- Choose carefully.

When -

- Check the calendars of other local agencies and groups to see if there is a lot of competition for attendance on that date.
- Is it a holiday?
- The week that school starts?
- Morning or afternoon event?

Where -

- If you want to close your street you must apply for a Permit from the San Jose Police Department. Permits number is 277-4452.
- If you want your event in a City Park outside of the Downtown Core - call Leininger Center at 277-4191.
- Choose the site carefully - shade, bathrooms, water, electrical outlets, permission from surrounding neighbor's etc.
- Once you begin to go through the Street Closure or Park Use Permit - you will need to make sure that all of the regulations are understood and followed. You can never ask too many questions. Pay attention to all the small details

How -

- Effective organization, sub-committees, volunteers, funding etc.

Insurance!! - Make sure you have coverage for the event!

Some Possible Sub-Committees Necessary for an Event

- ***Garbage*** - this is a problem that can take you by surprise if you don't make arrangements ahead of time. Consider how many garbage cans you need around the site. The more the

better. Be sure to designate a few for recyclable stuff, like cans plastic water bottles and plastic utensils. We need to be responsible about the environment. Before the event figure out how you are going to dispose of the trash. Will you need to call for a special pick-up? Can you divide it as part of the household waste? Just be sure to have a plan. When budgeting for the event, remember to include garbage bags and the fee for an extra pick-up if necessary. Finally the person in charge of garbage needs to see it through until the last bag is hauled away.

- ***Facilities Management*** - Who is responsible for the site layout? Who will order the appropriate equipment? Who will ensure that all the required permits and regulations are followed?
- ***Media & Community Notification*** - Ask for help from your council member. Who do you want to attend your event? What is the best way to contact them?
- ***Food*** - First rule: Don't poison anybody!!! So make sure everything is properly refrigerated or kept on lots of ice and in coolers. Especially in the hot summer. Your Food Volunteer must be very aware of this and skilled enough to handle the responsibility.

It's pretty standard to ask all neighbors to bring a side dish. This usually works out well. Then the Neighborhood Association can provide the meat for the BBQ and buns and beverages. Tailor the food to your type of event. Be sure to have your Food Volunteer label and keep track of peoples serving dishes and utensils. You will inevitably have some pieces left behind and someone needs to play lost & found after it's

all over.

- ***Entertainment*** - Where will the audience sit? Where will the sound go? Who will be in charge of greeting the entertainers? Is there an MC? What are the special requirements of the performers? Music: live bands, DJ's, large boom box (most of these can be had for free). Dancers: any local folk group, ballet schools, cheerleaders, whatever -- it's all fun. Theatre: small plays or street theatre. Include the kids. Workshops: demonstration tables of any sort - needlework, craft projects, skate boarders demos, astronomy, garden stuff, HAM radio guys, painters, etc.
- ***Kids Tables & Games*** - Not all activities are appropriate for all ages. Adults who have experience with children are most appropriate to design the activity. Adult supervision is always required.
- ***Contests & Prizes*** - Do you have/need judges? Contest length of time. Can you keep the attention of the crowd?
- ***Resource Fair*** - Any event is a great opportunity for enrollment into the activities of the neighborhood, as well as a useful center for information. Be sure to have one table set up for your Neighborhood Association with sign-up sheets to gather addresses and email lists, information about the Association and the date of the next meeting.

Other programs that are available for resource fairs are the San Jose City Recycling Program, various departments of Parks and Recreation, SNI, local health centers, Food Bank, Emergency Preparedness, Adopt-A-Park, etc.

- ***Clean up*** - The toughest job to fill. Make sure you have enough people to help you clean up. Try and make this job as fun as possible
- ***Documentation & Database*** - What worked? What needs to change?
- ***Volunteers*** - Keep them watered and if possible - fed! Realize They will not share the same passion for the event as your committee members. Say Thank-you!
- ***Tables, tents, awnings, etc.*** - Carefully lay out (draw a site map) of how many tables, chairs, awnings, podiums, stages, sound equipment, etc you will need. Be generous. These items may be borrows from residents and/or rented from party rental stores. Delivery and pick-up of rented items in usually available for a nominal fee. I highly recommend that you pay the fee to have them do it. It is a huge hassle and a backbreaking experience at the end of a hard day - skip it if you can.

Making It Special

It's important to generate some creative and fun aspects of the event that will make it memorable for all those attending. You may want to stage any number of old fashioned contests such as Best Dessert in the Neighborhood, Dance contests, Funny Dog Costumes, or Funny Hat Contest, that will give folks a chance to show off a little and be silly and laugh together. These are great photo opportunities. Put them on a quick web site afterward for everyone to enjoy, or publish the winners and photos in the next newsletter.

Also at the Party Rental store there are a variety of fun machines such as Sno-Cone and Popcorn machines that everyone likes. The helium balloon tanks are inexpensive. And depending on the site there are fog machines and bubble making machines, which add a certain ambience.

Inviting Notables

Most City officials (such as councilpersons or the Mayor) are happy to make a showing at neighborhood events, but they must be given A LOT of notice. Their calendars are very full and you've got to book them early. They are often happy to be judges in contests or to announce awards. They usually cannot stay for long but will put in an appearance.

Many of the staff writers at local newspapers are willing to come - especially if they cover neighborhoods or the arts or some relevant issue - in their regular column. Also local disc jockeys may be available or some local television host. Special people at your event make it feel even more special.

Funding

If you plan well and far enough ahead, you may be able to receive a grant for your event before it happens. If not, you will have to pay out of pocket and be reimbursed when the grant money arrives. Events can be expensive. Make sure you have a few folks who are able to carry the balance for awhile until the grant money arrives. Figure this all out LONG BEFORE THE EVENT -- no last minute financial surprises.

There are several sources for funding through the City such as the Community Action and Pride Grant (CAP) and the SJ BBQ &

Beautification Fund. Be sure and keep all receipts and careful bookkeeping for your records. They re necessary in order to receive grants.

Post Script

After it's all over be sure and have a quick de-briefing meeting with everyone involved in creating the event. Write down people's impressions of how it went. Take notes on the things that worked and the things that didn't work. Thank your volunteers profusely both publicly at the event and one-on-one afterwards. No volunteers mean no event. They are your most valuable resource. Congratulate yourselves for a job well done and never, never, never place blame or judgment on anyone for any kind of mishap. Take responsibility collectively and not how you'll do better next time.

But most of all HAVE FUN - DON'T TAKE ANYTHING TOO SERIOUSLY -- KNOW YOU'RE DOING YOUR BEST FOR YOUR COMMUNITY. Take pride in that.